

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-11

WASHINGTON POST
27 July 1985

Envoy Says Suspected Spy Is Not a Ghanaian Agent

Judge Denies Soussoudis' Bond Appeal

By Caryle Murphy
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Ghana's ambassador to the United States said yesterday that a Ghanaian national accused of obtaining secret information about CIA operations in Ghana from a CIA employe was not a member of Ghana's intelligence service, as the FBI and a federal prosecutor have alleged.

Ambassador Eric Otoo said that Michael Agbotui Soussoudis entered the United States in late June using a valid Ghanaian passport and held a valid permit in Ghana for his .9 mm pistol. "If he had worked for the security, he would not have to have a gun permit. They don't need them," Otoo said.

"If you do not work for security, then you need a permit," he said.

Otoo made his comments yesterday outside a courtroom in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, where he attended a bond hearing for Soussoudis. Judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. yesterday denied Soussoudis' appeal of a U.S. magistrate's order last week that he be held without bond.

Soussoudis, 39, who is a first cousin of Ghana's leader, Flight Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, was charged with espionage July 11, along with Sharon M. Scranage, 29, of King George, Va. According to FBI affidavits and agents' testimony, Scranage allegedly gave Soussoudis, her former lover, classified information from CIA files in Ghana.

"According to people who knew

[Scranage and Soussoudis], they were going around in Ghana openly," Otoo said. "Everybody knew it, but they thought she was a secretary."

Otoo, who has offered to let Soussoudis live in his residence and guarantee his appearance at future court hearings if released on bond, said Soussoudis "has lived in New York since high school."

"He returned to Ghana because his cousin was in power. I would do it, too, if my cousin came to power. He would make more money as a businessman than working for the intelligence service," Otoo said.

The ambassador said that if Scranage were giving Soussoudis secret information about CIA informants in Ghana since late last year, as an FBI agent testified last week in court, then the Ghanaian government would have made arrests. "Why did they wait?" he asked.

News reports from Ghana have said that several high-ranking officials in Ghana were in hiding or have been arrested since Soussoudis' and Scranage's arrests. Otoo said no one had been arrested but that "a few people have left their jobs."

"We value our relations with the United States," said the ambassador.

Soussoudis' lawyer, Plato Cacheris, said yesterday he would appeal Bryan's decision. He said Soussoudis should not be charged with espionage because he was only trying to get information about Ghana inside that country.